

HILA 131: History of Mexico: From Spanish Conquest to Modern Nation

MWF 10:00-10:50

Center Hall 222

Professor Matthew Vitz. Office Hours Tuesdays 10-11 and Wednesdays 1-2:30, or by appointment

“So far from God so close to the United States”

--A popular saying in Mexico, generally attributed to Mexican president (dictator) Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911)

“May slavery be banished forever together with the distinction between castes, all remaining equal, so Americans may only be distinguished by vice or virtue... In the new laws, may torture not be allowed.”

--José María Morelos, Mexican independence leader, 1813

Mexico, our neighbor to the south, has a fascinating history with which most Americans are unfamiliar (Middle-class and wealthy Mexicans know far more about the United States than Americans know about Mexico). For many of us, Mexico is a land of pristine (or once pristine) beaches, ruins of past indigenous civilizations, and, of course, violent drug cartels. For many others, it is also a place of backwardness, a nation trying to play catch-up economically and politically to the United States and other industrialized nations. These conceptions flatten Mexican culture and history and tend to turn violence and notions like “backwardness” into innate cultural characteristics instead of phenomena historically produced and reproduced by the many decisions individuals have made within relationships of inequality and power (both national and international).

This course will look at Mexican history over 400 years, from the rise of Mexico (Aztec civilization) and its fall at the hands of the Spaniard Hernan Cortes and his indigenous allies to the development of the modern Mexican nation-state under Porfirio Díaz. We will delve into the way men and women lived their daily lives within social relationships of inequality and hierarchy in both colonial Mexico (New Spain) and in independent Mexico, the way political power operated and changed over time, the important role that race came to play in the colonial and national periods, and the strained relationship Mexico held to the United States eager to fulfill its “Manifest Destiny” during the nineteenth century, among other key topics. We will discuss why Mexico lost half its national territory to the U.S. in 1848 and learn why national elites were able to centralize governance and establish civil order in the years following.

This course bridges the colonial and national history of Mexico at the risk of committing anachronism, an absolute no-no in the discipline of History. Anachronism is the misplacement of an object, custom, or idea in time: hence, including a section on the Aztecs in a history of Mexico course could fall into this

category. Thus, it is important to be aware that Mexico was not Mexico (the independent nation) until 1821 and that none of the events or processes prior to Independence, except for the independence movement itself, had anything to do with the Mexican nation per se, or with designs to attain it. I would rather make this qualification than rename the course something like “The History of the Aztecs, colonial New Spain, and Independent Mexico.” While these histories prior to independence do not deal with Mexico in the strict sense, it would be impossible to understand the development of the Mexican nation without first learning about the colony from which it was born and the diverse peoples who inhabited it with distinct cultures, habits, and world-views. This is known in Mexico and elsewhere from Africa to Asia affected by imperialism as a nation’s colonial legacy.

Because of the incredible breadth of this course, I have divided it into four sections. The first three are chronological: 1. Indigenous Civilization and Spanish Conquest 2. Colonization: Social, Cultural, and Political Experience 3. Independence and the Vicissitudes of Modern Nationhood. We will spend nearly half the quarter on section 3, learning why and how Mexico gained independence and exploring the limits of citizenship and nationhood, conflicting political ideologies, and the everyday lives of Mexicans—their modes of livelihood, their cultures, and their acts of resistance and rebellion to the status quo. The fourth section is thematic and will cover themes of interest during the final week: urban Mexico, the making of the border, and religion.

Structure

This is a lecture course, and while lecture will take up a majority of class time, I will integrate other activities as well: reading discussion, “one-minute papers” to review lecture material, the occasional film or other multimedia presentation, in-class primary source readings, and other activities. Discussions of the readings will take place the day the reading is due and will frequently address questions that I assign to you beforehand. Note that I will often have you discuss the readings in small groups first and then proceed to a full class discussion. Your participation grade, therefore, is important.

“There is no thought without words,” as Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure remarked, so much of this class will be dedicated to you thinking for yourself, developing your own informed arguments, and making your own sense of history in order to come to grips with the world we live in. This requires your participation in class (I will offer you numerous opportunities in small and large groups, the “one-minute papers,” questions during lecture, etc.) as well as your ability to write critically, convincingly, and coherently about the past (see below).

Course requirements

Map quiz 5% (colonial Spanish America and modern Mexico, with its states, cities, and key natural features. After all, we need to know where the places we are learning about are as well as their spatial relationship to each other.)

Response journals 10% (4 short papers of 1-2 pages each over the course of the semester to be uploaded to Ted. See separate hand-out on how to approach the response journals.)

Mid-term paper 25% (a take-home exam where you will be asked to answer one question in 5-7 pages using material from lectures, readings, and in-class multimedia)

Quiz 15% (end-of-term short answer quiz on lectures and reading material covered after the midterm)

Research paper 35% (10-12 pages on a topic and historical problem of your choosing. You will need to use at least two primary sources)

Two components to the grade:

- a.) paper topic/historical problem and annotated bibliography 10% for November 14
- b.) final paper 25% due during final exam period

Participation 10% (see above on opportunities for class participation)

Course Goals:

--Effective and critical thinking about the past to understand the myriad ways in which humans have related to and interacted with one another, the way inequalities and social hierarchies are constructed and maintained over time, and the lives of individuals and groups within these structures of power

--Ability to write coherently and analytically about the past

--Grow knowledge of Mexican culture, history, and politics (Mexico is, after all, just 30 minutes down I-5!)

--Effective public speaking skills

--The capacity to read primary source material and compare events across time and space

Reading Requirements:

Three books are available for purchase at the university bookstore. (Note: they are also widely available online)

Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy Henderson, *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Duke, 2003).

Mark Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Men, Women, and War* (New Mexico, 2000).

Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford, 2003)

The other required reading assignments will be posted to Ted.

I have assigned readings to be due on Fridays, and that is when your response journals will be due. However, there may be occasions in which I ask you to do part of the reading for Monday or Wednesday.

Here is a list of recommended readings on the history of Mexico. These are general synthetic textbooks that can help you capture the bigger picture (lectures also serve this purpose). I will place these books on reserve at the library. If you would like additional reading material on a particular topic covered in class, please feel free to see me during office hours or shoot me an email.

Colin M. MacLachlan and William H. Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico*, vol. 1: 1821-1911 (Prentice-Hall)

Michael C. Meyer and William Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History* (Oxford University Press; there are several editions—get the latest).

A fantastic non-text media source is The Getty Institute's "A Nation Emerges: 65 Years of Photography in Mexico."

See:

http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/guides_bibliographies/photography_mexico/

A Brief Note on Note-Taking

Take good notes. Understand the key themes and argument of each lecture, the key people involved, and the key terms. I will provide a list of key terms at the beginning of each class. In your exams, you will need to use evidence in the forms of historical examples and cases from the lectures and readings. This is how I know you understand the material. Use the key terms as a guide for your note taking. If you are confused during lecture, raise your hand. No question is a bad question, but the more you engage with the material and the better notes you take during lectures and during reading the better and more germane your questions will be.

Office Hours and Availability

If you cannot see me during office hours, please send me an email to arrange an alternative time. I want you to do well in this class, so please stay in touch with me

throughout the semester. If you are confused about the material or if you're having trouble keeping up in class, do not hesitate to see me.

Accessibility

Students with disabilities enrolled in the course and who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, unless university assistance is needed to implement a requested accommodation.

Additional Support for Learning

Writing is essential for this class, just as it will be essential for whatever career you choose. Writing is a fundamental way we express ourselves, convince others to change their minds, and describe events, processes, and experiences. Without it, we can be misunderstood, misrepresented, and, perhaps worst of all, judged. Take it seriously in this class and all others you take. Be sure that what you write is clear, coherent, well organized, well argued, and error free. Good writing will serve you for years to come. I will provide some feedback specific to grammar, sentence organization, clarity, and organization when I grade your work. However, there is only so much I can do. If you would like to improve your writing (and thus your grade), I highly recommend you make an appointment at the Writing Center where you can meet with a writing mentor.

<https://writingcenter.ucsd.edu/>

Academic Integrity

Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. You may work in groups or consult with other classmates for assignments, but all work in the end must be your own.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. There are two kinds of plagiarism: copying the work of another person word for word (a sentence, part of a sentence or more) and the use of idea(s) that you do not attribute to its author with a citation). If I catch an act of plagiarism, I will consult with university authorities (The Academic Integrity Office). This could result in automatic failure of the class or the assignment, depending on the severity of the case, as well as additional administrative sanctions.

Respect and tolerance of others is essential to the functioning of our class. It is important to engage in debate and discussion about the course material, but we must do so in a respectful and civilized way.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Friday, October 3: Course introduction

Part I: Indigenous Civilization and Spanish Conquest

Monday, October 6: The Maya

Wednesday, October 8: Tenochtitlan and the Mexica (or Aztecs)

-map quiz

Friday, October 10: Spain and the New World

Readings: *The Mexico Reader*, 1-54; 61-91 (**Response journal due on Ted by class time Friday**) Be prepared to discuss the readings in class

Monday, October 13: Cortes and the Conquest of the Mexica

Part II: Colonization: Social, Cultural, and Political Experience

Wednesday, October 15: Mercantilism and the Colonial Economy: How Mexican Wealth Helped Create Global Capitalism

Friday, October 17: Race, Gender, and Labor: Living under Colonial Rule

-Film clip in class: "Black in Latin America: Mexico"

Readings: Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*: Introduction, chapters 3, 4, and 5, chapter 7, and epilogue; and *The Mexico Reader*, 95-104 (**response journal due. You must write on both readings, making connections among them**)

Monday, October 20: The Rise of the Americans: New World Identities

Wednesday, October 22: The Bourbon Reforms

Friday, October 24: Popular Rebellion and Elite Reaction, 1810-1820

Readings: *The Mexico Reader*, 131-40 and 122-30; and Pamela Voekel, "Peeing on the Palace: Bodily Resistance and Bourbon Reforms in Mexico City" *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5 (2) 1992: 183-208

-I will pass out two possible mid-term questions in class.

Monday, October 27: Independence Consummated, 1821

Wednesday, October 29: Review of mid-term material

Readings for Wednesday: *The Mexico Reader*, 189-206

Part III: Independence and the Vicissitudes of Modern Nationhood

Friday, October 31 Democracy and Popular Participation

Midterm paper due @5pm, upload to Ted)

Monday, November 3: Dilemmas of the new Nation-state: Coups, Rebellion, and Division

Wednesday, November 5: Dilemmas of the new Nation State: Indigenous Peoples

-Review of potential paper topics/Q&A on final papers

Friday, November 7: Dilemmas of the new Nation state: Gender and Citizenship

Readings: *The Mexico Reader* 206-12; Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics*, 3-73
(response journal due)

Monday, November 10: Santa Ana, Texas, and The North American Invasion

Wednesday, November 12: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and its Repercussions

Friday, November 14: The Liberal Reforms

-Paper topic/annotated bibliographies Due 5pm on Ted

Readings: *The Mexico Reader*, Otero, 226-51; and Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics*, 74-111.

Monday, November 17: The Deepening of the Liberal-Conservative Divide: Different Views of Mexican History and Future

Wednesday, November 19: New Imperial France Comes to Old Mexico

Friday, November 21: The Liberals Triumph

Readings: *The Mexico Reader*, 252-72; and Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics*, 112-157 (**response paper due**)

Monday, November 24: The Rise of Porfirio Díaz and Authoritarian Liberalism

-In-class reading assignment

Wednesday, November 26: No class. **Work on final papers**

Monday, December 1: Henequen, Oil, and Sugar: The Commodity Economy of late Nineteenth-century Mexico

Wednesday, December 3: Everyday Life Under Porfirio Díaz

-Display of Photographs in class, with discussion

Friday, December 5: Prelude to Revolution

-In-class quiz (short answers on key terms on nineteenth-century Mexico)

Readings: *The Mexico Reader*, 273-303 (with photographs starting at 303); Wasserman, 171-228

Monday, December 8: A History of Mexico City, 1321 to 1910

Wednesday, December 10: From Northern Frontier to National Border: Tijuana to the Rio Grande

-Discussion of progress on final papers

Friday, December 12: (Día de la Virgen) The Virgin of Guadalupe: National Symbol, National History

Final Research Papers due during Exam Period